

Running Head: The Cyber-Newsroom

The Cyber-Newsroom:

A case study of the journalistic paradigm

in a news narrative's journey from a newspaper to cyberspace

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Abstract

The Spokesman Review published the results of its investigation of Spokane, Wash., Mayor Jim West in the newspaper, and used its website to provide proof of the journalism it printed. This narrative and discourse analysis offers an examination of that coverage in both media channels to determine how the added material changed the news story about Jim West, a politician accused of pedophilia. A traditional understanding of the news paradigm informed the study, which sought to explain what the story changes might mean for journalism. The most significant finding of this case study was that the story of Jim West in the newspaper (produced by a ‘traditional’ American print newsroom) transformed into a story about the journalism of *The Spokesman-Review*. A new, second-order newsroom – a cyber-newsroom – was created on this website. In this realm, the back-story of *The Spokesman-Review* newsgathering was shared. Here, readers joined with journalists in disseminating, gatekeeping, and repairing the news. A new news narrative formed.

Molotch and Lester (1974/1997) “see media as reflecting not a world out there, but the practices of those having the power to determine the experience of others” (p. 206). Online theorists have hypothesized that the Internet technology with its multimedia and interactivity will provide a more “real” news experience by allowing readers the opportunity to verify and participate in the journalism. When *The Spokesman Review* editor Steve Smith and his staff produced its year-long, award-winning investigation on Spokane, Wash., Mayor Jim West, the newspaper looked to its website to provide the proof of the journalism that appeared on the printed page. Smith said he wanted to

establish a culture of transparency. Putting the background material online was just good journalism. We didn’t want to hold anything back. We wanted to throw everything we had at everyone, so people would see that we were not making this stuff up. It was an offensive move on our part. (S. Smith, personal communication, June 28, 2006)

During 2005, the newspaper and its website accused West of pedophilia and abuse of his political office. This narrative and discourse analysis offers an examination of that coverage in both media channels to determine how the added online material changed the news story about Jim West. A traditional understanding of the news paradigm informed the study, which sought to explain what the changes in the Jim West story might indicate about journalism’s evolution for the Internet.

The most significant finding of this case study was that the story of Jim West in the newspaper transformed into a story about the *journalism* of *The Spokesman-Review*. A new, second-order newsroom – a cyber-newsroom – was created on this website. This virtual sheath represented a sub-layer of the main or first-order newsroom that produced

the West investigation and newspaper stories. In this secondary realm, the back-story of *The Spokesman-Review* newsgathering was shared. Here, sources and readers joined with journalists in disseminating, gatekeeping, and repairing the news. In the process, the traditional journalistic paradigm seemed to shift, and a new more layered, more complex news narrative resulted.

The News Paradigm

News embodies the power to present a dominant picture of reality (Lippmann, 1922), tell people what to think about (Cohen, 1963), and provide a template for social roles and cultural rituals (Carey, 1989/1992). The newspaper press, as part of the Fourth Estate, has the authority to provide society with its facts (Jamieson & Waldman, 2003) because of the particular way it has operated as an institution (Cater, 1959; Cook, 1998; Sparrow, 1999). In the newsroom, journalists as authors have traditionally decided on the news story's content, which they select critically and precisely from their gathered facts. White (1950) described reporters and editors as the "gatekeepers" of all information because journalists must cull from data gleaned from a variety of sources.

The news story is guided by an enduring news paradigm within which reporters craft their stories based on an ingrained and learned pattern of cultural codes and social role play (Fishman, 1982/1997; Gans, 1979; Lule, 2001; Reese, 1997/1990). Fishman (1982/1997) described this as the "news net," a bureaucratic frame of reference. Tuchman (1978) advanced this idea by conceptualizing a journalistic "web of facticity," which reporters weave using one fact to build on another until the collection self-validates and the credibility of the news story is assured. These facts tend to be ordered, verified by select authoritative sources (Sigal, 1987), and nestled into particular frames that support

and reinforce the status quo (Goffman, 1974; Tuchman, 1978). Journalists strive for objectivity, which is the valuation of story balance (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Mindich, 1998). They do this in part by selecting various authoritative sources representing different perspectives and filling the news articles stories with their quotes – even though objectivity has been widely considered to be an impossible ideal (Tuchman, 1972; Reese, 1997/1990).

Reporters, wrote Schudson (1992), have an ingrained human instinct to oversimplify what has happened into narratives with beginnings, middles and ends. Journalists like to organize their facts according to the 5Ws: the what, why, where, when, and who that tell the story of the news event (Manoff & Schudson, 1987). Journalists bring their material back to the newsroom where they turn it into narratives that tell society a story about itself (Bird & Dardenne, 1988). Lule (2001) categorized seven different myths and archetypal characters he discovered in news coverage: The Hero, Trickster, Good Mother, The Other World, The Flood, The Scapegoat, and the Victim. Each mythic tale offers a model for human behavior that sustains the dominant social order, according to Lule (2001). One frame tends to dominate (Bird & Dardenne, 1988; Entman, 1994). When journalists or others break out of the accepted patterns to produce an alternate story, the result is a quick pull-back – a phenomenon Bennett et al. (1985) have called “news repair.” The institution critically responds to the wayward story by publishing contrary columns and stories that undermine the original story and provide verification for the mainstream story. This is the essential news paradigm guiding this paper.

Over the years, scholars have lamented that reporters seem to be increasingly influenced by external, sometimes malevolent forces such as politicians and media owners (Altschull, 1984; Fallows, 1996; Jamieson & Waldman, 2003; Postman, 1985, to name just a few of the most recent ones). Many have hoped that the potential of web technology might provide a more “real” accounting of the days’ events (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Deuze, 2003; Singer, 2001). Weblogs, for example, could be the ideal form of news. Wendland (2003, p. 94) noted that blogging consists of “news that is happening now almost in real time – not filtered, edited, or delay delivered, as with traditional media.” Newhagen and Levy (1998) contended that the Internet’s structure has already altered traditional journalism.

Other scholars downplay the Internet’s potential to “save” journalism by dispersing control over the news among sources and audiences. Radio and television were supposed to liberate the news, and instead corporations used broadcast channels to create new brands of journalism (Bagdikian, 1983/2004; Golding, 2000). Golding (2000) described the “mediatization” of new technologies that “follow past scenarios of commercialization, differentiated access, exclusion of the poor, privatization, deregulation, and globalization” (p.814). Resnick (1998) called it the “normalization” of the web. Journalists have already begun incorporating the new technology of the Internet into existing routines and practices. Cohen (2002) found that online news extended McManus’ (1994) market journalism in which news is commodity and readers are consumers. In her case study of industry criticisms of an online *San Jose Mercury News* expose, McCoy (2001) noted mainstream journalists’ swift “news repair” of the Internet journalism. Singer (2005) showed that journalists’ political weblogs tend to link to other

mainstream news sites, creating “in some ways an enhancement of traditional journalistic norms.” I also found support for the notion that journalists are using the medium’s attributes to reclaim journalistic authority in this new environment (Robinson, 2006).

However, even as journalists take advantage of the web for commercial purposes, the traditional news paradigm must be altered in this casting of new news nets.

Multimedia and interactivity have created new story forms. Citizens have been invited into the news production process. New facts are revealed online in audio and video. New characters speak from forums and blogs. What does this mean for that original web of facticity so carefully woven by reporters? Close study of one news narrative as it moves between the newspaper and its website would indicate how the traditional journalistic paradigm has been modified for the new environment.

Empirical in nature, case studies offer a chance to investigate real-world examples in a deep manner to obtain a holistic and meaningful characterization of life phenomena. The microscope of the case study provides a chance to scrutinize qualitatively, and then to draw informed conclusions from which more targeted scholarship can emerge. The selection of flagship websites for study has become a favorite method for online scholars in particular (Bruns, 2005; Matheson, 2004; Salwen, 2005, to name a few).

I chose to analyze the news narrative involving Spokane Mayor Jim West in *The Spokesman-Review* because it represented an ongoing, multi-faceted story that included a broad breadth of web features. In addition, *The Spokesman-Review* appeared to have reported and written its investigation according to the traditional news paradigm (Smith, 2005b). I wanted to know what the addition of multimedia, interactivity and other web-only features *by the same publication* did to the story. Therefore, the research questions

guiding this study were: 1) How did the news narrative change as it traveled from the newspaper to the Spokesman-Review.com website? Did the basic web of facticity grow, diminish, disappear, or stay the same? And, 2) what did these changes, if there were any, indicate about the traditional journalistic paradigm as discussed in the literature review?

To answer the first questions, I employed a narrative analysis of the news stories, photos, reader comments, audio transcripts, videos, and other newspaper and web features in *The Spokesman-Review* and The Spokesman-Review.com. Narrative analysis as a method

takes note of the events and anecdotes in stories (what is in them and what is left out) as well as overall plot development (how, in what order and with what language, the story is told, how it opens, how its conflict is established and resolved, and how it ends) and characterization (who, within the story structure, emerges as the most salient players and how they interact). When studying related material, the researcher considers not just each story's individual content and structure, but also recurring characters and subplots across all evidence. (Kitch & Hume, 2007, in press)

Such a method would reveal the web of facticity – the specific 5Ws of the news narrative – inherent in this case study, both in the print version and the web.

To answer the second question, I needed to overlay my narrative exploration with a discourse analysis. Discourse analysis allowed me to consider the findings from the Jim West narrative as part of a broader deliberation about the overall journalistic paradigm present in the case study. At the very least, the documentation of the web of facticity would begin to show how journalists are storytelling for the new medium, including what

kinds of facts are valued online versus in print, and how those new story forms result in new kinds of knowledge for consumers.

The Case Study: The Jim West saga

Early in the new millennium *The Spokesman-Review* uncovered evidence that Jim West, the mayor of Spokane, Wash., may have sexually molested at least two Boy Scouts while he was a deputy sheriff and Boy Scout Troop leader in the 1970s. Furthermore, other Spokane sources contended that he was currently using City Hall computers to contact teen-aged boys to date on the sly. A Republican, Jim West had built a political career fighting homosexuals' legal rights, espousing "family values," and dating women. The newspaper's editors believed West's actions to be inappropriate, hypocritical and perhaps criminal.

In 2003, the newspaper launched a two-pronged investigation: The first was to track down West's alleged abuse victims from the 1970s (named Michael Grant and Robert Galliher), and the second was to hire a forensic consultant to pose as a 17-year-old boy on Gay.com, a website West was known to frequent. The forensic expert adopted the pseudonym "Moto-Brock" online. He loitered on Gay.com until West contacted him under the handle "JMSElton." The two then engaged in a series of chats that became sexually explicit after "Moto-Brock" told West he had turned 18. The newspaper interviewed several gay teens who had had contact with West in the chat rooms.

Three *Spokesman-Review* reporters – Bill Morlin, Mike Prager, and Karen Dorn Steele – wrote most of the 250 stories on Jim West between May 2005 and February 2006. The coverage began on Thursday, May 5, 2005 with six lengthy print stories and 14 photos covering a five-page spread. It led with a 90-inch piece titled "West tied to sex

abuse in 70s, using office to lure young men: Allegations shadow politician throughout his career” (Morlin, 2005a). On May 6, the banner headline read “West sorry but staying” (Prager, 2005), next to four lengthy stories. For the next two weeks, the reporters blanketed the newspaper with stories ranging from the ethics of using an office computer for personal use (Vestal, 2005), the vulnerability of distressed boys (de Leon, 2005), and official reaction (Prager, 2005a). On May 10, 2005, West took a leave from his office to deal with the legal and political battles. Efforts to recall West were successful in December 2005. Two months later the FBI cleared him of any wrongdoing regarding his political office. (The statute of limitations had long expired on the pedophilia charges.) West died of cancer in July 2006.

The newspaper’s website became a clearinghouse for the Jim West coverage. By February 2006, readers could access 38 audio clips of interviews, 12 videos of press conferences and newscasts, 35 documents such as internal City Hall memos, press releases from the government, recall petitions, and West’s tax documents, as well as archives of letters to the editors and the 2003 stories about accused priests and officers. Editors posted nine private web chats and 50 emails between West and gay teens (including someone hired by the newspaper to pose as a gay teen). Some 428 readers posted comments to the moderated reader forum about West on the website. Another 78 participated in three online chats with Editor Steve Smith. Hyperlinks listed on the site sent readers to a Google search of news sites that mentioned West or *The Spokesman-Review’s* coverage. Another link brought readers to Technorati, a searchable database that listed citizen blogs discussing the Jim West situation.

To textually analyze, I read through all the (hard-copy) print stories and web features chronologically, twice, cataloguing the storyline, datelines and settings, time elements, and the characters present in the narrative (the what, why, where, when, and who). Then, I returned to the first day of coverage on May 5, 2005, and followed the narrative elements from the newspaper to the website for each day of coverage until West's departure from office Dec. 16, 2005. When a hyperlink appeared, I clicked on it. I then clicked on at least one more hyperlink on that page, if possible, in order to follow the new narrative thread. As I was writing the paper, I returned to the narrative to isolate a character or setting and track the element from the print article to the online features.

Using the news paradigm as a guide, I organized the evidence according to newsroom's 5Ws. The first section explains the "what" and "why" of the story – the particular facts that *The Spokesman-Review* selected to publish in the newspaper and on the website as a narrative. I determined the particular narrative and myth of the story by noting the phrasing of the story plots, the selection of certain facts, the emphasis of certain themes, and the relaying of any particular lesson or moral. A subsequent section detailed the when and where, which were found by isolating the semiotic marks of time and place within the news feature such as the tense of the verb and the description of the setting. The final analysis section explored the who of the news narrative, which was revealed through a study of the sources that showed up in the sample. To determine if a character was "developed" or not, I examined the amount of copy attributed to that source, noted whether any personal information about the source was shared, and identified the existence and nature of any relationships between the source and other

characters. My unit of analysis was the news narrative itself as it flowed between media channels.

The What and Why

Romano (1987) claimed that the press strings together facts that tell a “coherent narrative of the world that serves particular purposes” (p. 42). In the newspaper, *The Spokesman-Review* formed a myth about the mayor and other accused pedophiles as “tricksters” – one of the myths laid out by Lule in 2001. In these stories, the “trickster” was highly sexed, deviant, and self-destructive. Jim West represented the anti-hero who demonstrated the need for a societal value system. Through him, *The Spokesman-Review* reporters moralized about the sanctity of authority. “For a quarter century, the man who is now Spokane's mayor has used positions of public trust – as a sheriff's deputy, Boy Scout leader and powerful politician – to develop sexual relationships with boys and young men,” read the lead of the main story on May 5, 2005 (Morlin, 2005a). The reporters wove a story about a trusted authoritative figure (in a “position of public trust”) stepping outside of accepted convention and taking advantage of young, innocent boys.

True to many such stories (Carey, 1987), the newspaper did little to examine the motivations of West (the why) beyond mentioning the emotional turmoil of being a closeted gay man and quoting West's remarks, “ ‘I can't tell you why I go there, to tell you the truth ... curiosity, confused, whatever, I don't know,’ the mayor said” (Morlin, 2005a). This sentence was followed by this: “Rumors about inappropriate sexual behavior have shadowed West for years in state political circles.” This information refers to allegations against West that he molested two children back in the 1970s. The juxtaposition conflates two very different facts of this news story, though: 1) that West

has struggled with a bisexual identity and 2) that he may have sexually abused children 30 years ago. The conflation casts West's private *and legal* actions as a gay man as being morally wrong.

The narrative of the abuse was told from the point of view of these alleged victims (Galliher and Grant), now adults. In contrast to West, Galliher and Grant were depicted as rational, making logical choices about their actions (Morlin, 2005a). Other pieces detailed the mayor's anti-gay public policies, West's record as an effective and popular mayor in the Spokane City Hall, a timeline of his lengthy political career, and the newspaper's investigative tactics by the editor. Together these news articles and photos formed a web of facticity that described a rogue official who failed to govern according to the mainstream principles of his institution and community.

Dominant themes in the series centered upon justice, hypocrisy, ethics, and power struggles between unequal contenders. The stories contrasted West's success with the unfortunate lives of the victims ("While Galliher and Grant struggled with drug addiction and incarceration as adults, West moved on to become one of the most influential Republicans in the state," Morlin, 2005a). It should be noted that West was never charged with such molestation, and the only evidence of it was the word of these two victims. The pairing of these two facts suggested that in his political success, West was getting away with something he should not be (acting as a trickster). The reporters painted him as a hypocrite (as in "Jim West criticized the "sex Nazis" who try to regulate private sexual behavior. For years, that's exactly what West tried to do in Olympia" Steele, 2005). This phrasing implied that West was a "sex Nazi" for vetoing same-sex partner benefits. One moral here was that homosexual politicians must support gay-friendly public policy.

Many of the facts that supported these themes came from *The Spokesman-Review*'s established authorities. *The Spokesman-Review* wrote stories after the various investigators released public records, such as "West spent hours online at Gay.com" (Morlin, 2005j), "Photos public, yet private" (Morlin, 2005h), and "West accessed sex sites on trips: Records show mayor looked for men when in cities on business" (Morlin & Rodkey, 2005). Each story was framed around the "records" or other releases from the FBI.

A key part of the newspaper's investigation was their "forensic computer expert," who assumed the identity of a gay teen with the web handle Moto-Brock. In the newspaper, Moto-Brock was referred to as the "consultant" but was otherwise an anonymous witness, as in this lead phrase in a May 5, 2005 newspaper story: "In an Internet chat room last New Year's Eve where he discussed his recent date with an 18-year-old man" (Steele, 2005). Here, the 18-year-old unnamed source was the forensic consultant. In another article, the reporters declared "Moto-Brock" an "expert" (Morlin, 2005g). This story included a segment from the Internet chats in which Moto-Brock learned that his chat partner was really the mayor. The chat excerpt in the newspaper made it clear that Moto-Brock encouraged West's flirtations, but it included editorial notations such as "West electronically sends his photo during the chat, but Moto-Brock acts like he doesn't immediately recognize him." These interruptions reminded the reader that "Moto-Brock" was playing a part and that any of his "facts" displayed in these chats were fiction. Moto-Brock's only role in this narrative was as an expert bearing witness to West's misbehavior. These editorial notations in the newspaper put the emphasis back on

West. Therefore, the “facts” of these chat excerpts (such as West revealing that he was the mayor) bolstered the news narrative that West was a fraud and hypocrite.

The “facts” were reordered online

The copious amount of material provided on Spokesman-Review.com reordered these “facts” of the Jim West narrative. The myth of the “trickster” grew less prominent, and its assertions about societal standards less obvious. For example, the alleged victim Robert Galliher made the accusations against West in an assured manner in the newspaper articles. But Galliher presented a different profile on the website. The narrative in this interview transcript was focused as much on Galliher as an adult convict as on his childhood abuse. As an adult, Galliher said he was considered “the worst of the worst, which I really don’t think I’m that bad.” The “facts” of this interview were jumbled, and ranged from Galliher’s upbringing to his armed robberies to his childhood friends to his time in jail (Morlin, 2005b). None of his statements was validated by another source, at least on the website.

Similarly, in his website appearances, the forensic consultant as expert disappeared. In his place, “Moto-Brock” became a character in his own right with feelings, motivations, and actions. His relationship with West became a central narrative theme. Here is an excerpt about West, a.k.a. “jmselton,” and Moto-Brock’s first homosexual experiences (motobrock34 & jmselton, 2005b):

motobrock34: ok, here’s a question

motobrock34: how in the hell did that happen the first time...I mean how did you BOTH know that was something you could do together?...

jmselton: we both had lake cabins close by so we would stay over some times and sleep next to each other.

jmselton: one time i felt him reach over me and put his hand on my cock through my underwear.

motobrock34: that was pretty risky!...

motobrock34: I'm going to seattle next month for the supercross and will be staying with some friends

jmselton: anyone you want to sleep with?

motobrock34: yeah, i've shared like the same bed kinda thing in the motorhome...

jmselton: this is what you do. let the guy you want and one other guy take the beds first...

jmselton: then you lay on the floor but complain that it is too hard and your back hurts and get into bed with the guy you like.

jmselton: promise to stay on your side of the bed.

jmselton: and then stay on your side of the bed.

jmselton: for the first night.

motobrock34: ok

motobrock34: and on the second, pretend to be asleep and let my hand fall over to his side

At the end of this chat, West gave Moto-Brock a virtual handjob. The chat transcript reads like a pornographic novel. In another chat excerpt, "jmselton" and "motobrock34" discussed having relationships with girls and living as closeted gay men:

jmselton: just because you think you like guys sexually doesn't necessarily mean that you won't like girls that way too.

jmselton: there might be that one special girl out there some place.

jmselton: many guys go both ways.

motobrock34: maybe so, but it doesn't feel like that inside....maySbe so if I ever met that person

motobrock34: I go out with girls sometimes now you know

jmselton: did you grow up thinking that sex before marriage was a bad thing?

motobrock34: good question. Kinda but I don't know, my parents never really preached to me about it... (Motobrock34 & jmselton, 2005a)

The chats revealed Moto-Brock's biking hobby, his concerns about being a gay teen, and his irritation with his mother, as well as Jim West's past ventures into homosexuality, his worries about being discovered, and his counsels of Moto-Brock on how to "get some."

The emails and chats together contained a love story between these two online characters, "Moto-Brock" and "jmselton." The newspaper – as is standard – shied away from most of these details. Even the word "masturbation" in the newspaper prompted the reader advisory: "This story contains references to sexual activity and may be objectionable to some readers" (Morlin, 2005i). The narrative on these pages did not resemble a traditional newspaper story as Romano (1987) or other theorists have described.

The "what" is journalism, not myth

Instead, the focus of the online narrative passed from Jim West to *The Spokesman-Review* and its reporters. In its West coverage, *The Spokesman-Review* constantly reiterated its investigative tactics as a way to validate the facts of the news narrative. In the newspaper, Editor Steven Smith tried to keep the spotlight on Jim West and promote the reporters' role as being an objective observer only. His May 5 story

carefully detailed the “3-year investigation” and included a strict timeline of the newspaper’s methodology for the Jim West story in a chronological fashion (Smith, 2005b). He called upon the scientific method: “Through the use of public records, court documents, first-person accounts and a forensic computer expert, the newspaper has uncovered evidence that West has led a secret life for more than 25 years” (Smith, 2005b, A1). In the chats with readers, Smith kept the conversation focused on “the news” of Jim whenever accusations arose about the newspaper’s investigative tactics: “The story will continue to make Page 1 as developments warrant.... It’s not a crusade in my view, it’s news.” Here Smith was reminding readers that the newspaper coverage was driven by “developments,” not any vigilantism on the part of the paper. He asserted this over and over (Pitts, 2005), and in doing so, he refocused the narrative on the journalism.

Readers focused on *The Spokesman-Review*’s newsgathering as opposed to the Jim West myth. In these reader forums, “Reader” (2005), “Tammy” (2005), and others took the newspaper to task for its “fact” ordering about the Rogers story: “Regarding the recent allegation from Cherie Rodgers in Sunday’s paper about an admission by the mayor,...that’s just mudslinging now...the story is sordid enough without that kind of piling on” (Reader, 2005). The readers discussed the story about Jim West in the forum as much as they did the mayor.

The facts online include the back-story of the journalism

Many of the “facts” online represented journalistic remnants that did not fit into the space or context of the newspaper narrative on Jim West. The lost anecdotes, extraneous details, and any other pieces of the original news narrative were resurrected in the interview transcripts and blog entries where the news’ “back story” was learned. For

example, the lengthy conversations that the *Spokesman-Review* reporters had with Mayor Jim West about his life as a Boy Scout official, as a politician, and as a closeted gay man contained reminiscences that never made it into the print stories. In a sense, the reader could enter that cutting room where journalists had discarded reams of material gleaned during the reporting process. Here is a portion of a West interview:

(Reporter) Q: As scout master, if a group within your troop called themselves the Naked Apes, isn't something you might kind of remember and/or ask how did they originate that name? What was the origin of that name?

(West)A: I have no idea. I take the kids on a 50 mile hike to the Bob Marshall Wilderness area and it wasn't but about 15 years later that I found out they set a fire on that trip and had a bottle of booze with them.

Q: You found out how many years later

A: About 10 or 15. One of the kids was an adult and kind of laughing about it saying how they pulled the wool over our eyes.

Q: Was this just a campfire or a fire that got out of control?

A: They had a lighter and an aerosol can and they set a tree on fire." (Morlin & Steele, 2005)

The focus of the narrative was this anecdote about a camping incident involving adolescent pranks, rather than the "fact" that West liked "naked" boys. In this excerpt, West was in control of the narrative, not Morlin. These transcripts offered multiple storylines that had been passed over by the print reporters for the newspaper stories.

Online, the reader could see that the narrative was not being driven by “developments” (as Smith insisted to readers) but by reportage. Here is an excerpt of an interview between West and Reporter Bill Morlin:

(Reporter)Q: You turned the troop over to Rich Robinson. After you and Hahn left, Rich Robinson, whose a former...

(West)A: City prosecutor. So you took notes. There was somebody else, the other guy lived on 16th and Buttercup? Is that street? It's one street off, you know where the neighborhood is in the Valley, it's off of Carnahan hill, you take 16th straight east and you run into a busy street there until a, not a busy street, but a [INAUDIBLE] neighborhood. It's one street short of that in the Valley. And he lived right there on the corner, I remember that.

Q: So he took over the troop?

A: He came on as my asst scout master before I got elected to the legislature

Q: That's not Tim Carlson is it

A: No. Tim lived with me when I got elected city council. He was a roommate of mine. (Morlin & Steele, 2005)

Online, these audio listeners could hear how the times and places described in the print news stories were worked out by the reporter in the newsgathering process (Morlin, 2005b, 2005f). The facts were not sequential in these interviews – at least not yet. In fact, none of these facts even ended up in the story. In cyberspace, reporters deposited the raw material for readers to sift through. These web features de-emphasized the gatekeeping and synthesis roles of the press while highlighting the process of the newsgathering. In

this transition, the old facts were reordered, new facts emerged, and the narrative of Jim West was changed.

The Where and The When

For traditional journalism, the where and when of a story establishes credibility and contributes to the web of facticity that frames the narrative (Schudson, 1987; Hallin, 1987). In *The Spokesman-Review*, the reporters carefully constructed a setting and chronology that contrasted West's past with his present. Reporters used past-tense verbs such as "recalled" or "denied" even for current events. The textual setting was the place of the abuse in the past: the back of a patrol car, an apartment, a bathroom during the 1970s (Morlin, 2005a). The newspaper published photos of the alleged victims as young boys with a bike and in a Boy Scout uniform and paired these with photos of the men as unsmiling adults, one with his hand pressed up against a jailhouse window. The photos depicting West in the present showed him alone or being observed by people (Conklin, 2005; Plonka, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d). However, in file photos from the past, West was generally surrounded by other officials and friends (Associated Press, 2005; Mulvany, 2005b; Plonka, 2005a; Spokesman-Review, 2005). The photos visually displayed the temporal arc of the men's lives. In the victim photos, the reader could see the narrative theme of innocence lost; in the West pictures, the contrast demonstrated the transition from authority figure to ostracized transgressor. West moved from a celebratory, institution-based life supported by a community to a solitary, unhappy existence. The narrative of the characters moving through the specific time and places in these news stories reflected these dominant themes, which were consistent with the news paradigm.

Online, the setting of the journalism dominated. On *Spokesman-Review.com*, audience members visited the living rooms, prison conference spaces, offices and other places of the reporting in the video and audio. For example, the newspaper posted an audio clip of Spokane Councilwoman Cherie Rodgers discussing with *The Spokesman-Review* reporter a conflict she was having with Mayor Jim West. In the clip, visitors could listen to her eating something, they heard her emphasize certain words, and they could note her exasperated sighs (Morlin, 2005d). In audio of Councilman Joe Shogan, his voice was occasionally drowned out by background conversations (Morlin, 2005e). Public Affairs Officer Marlene Feist's audio with its awkward pauses and clipped tone revealed a hostility toward the reporters belied by her words (Morlin, 2005c). In the video, sources scowled and emphatically gestured, as in a segment of Spokane resident Shannon Sullivan as she arrived at City Hall to petition to recall the mayor (Mulvany, 2005). The ambient sound or visuals placed the focus on the medium's space – the interviews as opposed to the interviews' content.

Internet technology made it possible for readers to experience the time and place of the news story in the moment of its reporting. For example, *The Spokesman-Review* paired a May 10, 2005 story about Jim West announcing his leave from office (Prager & Steele, 2005) with a video of the press conference (Mulvany, 2005a). The only text on the page besides the headline was the date, in large font. The video opened with the camera jiggling as it pointed at West giving his statement. It then panned the audience, settling for a moment on *The Spokesman-Review* reporters and then the council chairman – much as a spectator would do to see how the players in the story might be reacting. At the end of the speech, the camera turned to follow West, as if it were a head swiveling to watch

him move from the podium to the chamber doors. The cameraman did not move in front of West as he left the room in either scenario, as a television crew might have to gain a longer shot. There were no obvious splices; the video played the entire event. The result was the feeling that the viewers were there at the event, as it was happening. Because visitors could experience the real environment of the interview, the interview seemed more authentic. In one sense, this seemed to add to the credibility of the West narrative. Yet the camera did not stay trained on West. The panning of the reporters added as much to the facticity web of *The Spokesman-Review* reportage narrative as it did to the West narrative.

Cyberspace became a setting, chronology

Furthermore, cyberspace introduced a temporal and spatial realm beyond the Jim West narrative's chronology and setting. The web was more than an information vessel, but also a communicative, interactive space. Visitors could fast-forward, pause, rewind, or stop the video of West. The Spokesman-Review.com established virtual settings with its "chat rooms," where people could meet and discuss the Jim West affair in real time. In establishing its own time and place dynamics, cyberspace became the facilitator and narrator of the narrative, bypassing the reporters in some cases. In posting the entire transcripts of Moto-Brock and Jim West chats, the newspaper reproduced that news event, creating a new virtual setting and chronology online. Readers witnessed the banter, the sexual innuendo, the pregnant pauses, and even virtual orgasms within these web pages of dialogue between the mayor and his "gay teen." Essentially, the ability to enter such settings meant readers could eavesdrop as if they were flies on the virtual wall as the event transpired. The succinctly ordered Jim West narrative of the newspaper seemed to

disintegrate online. Cyberspace carried the reader to a time before that narrative was fully formed. This allowed the reader to travel back in time, to before the gatekeeping of the newspaper reporters.

This does not mean the journalists were not present in this space; they were. For example, editor Steve Smith was main character of the new narrative about *The Spokesman-Review* in his chats with readers. Though he and his staff (the institution) had a hand in guiding the narrative (the chats were moderated), the proceedings unfolded around them as they were happening. His responses were improvised and immediate, a much different temporal ordering than the 24-hour deadline the newspaper allowed.

The Who

In the newspaper, the “who” of the Jim West news narrative reflected press scholars’ depictions of institutions, people of “authority,” and archetypal characters. The print reporters created heroes out of ordinary people who took action against West, as in “Shannon Sullivan is that someone: Single mom spearheading Mayor West recall against long odds” (Camden, 2005). Online, existing characters took on more depth, the journalists appeared in the text as characters, and readers showed up in the narrative.

Characters took on more depth online

The Jim West narrative of the newspaper portrayed a powerful, successful Washington State politician who had built a public life based on family values and conservatism, but was living a private life as a gay man. Throughout the coverage, West was an opponent in a battle, as in this story “A savvy West turns to the cameras: Mayor tries to seize offensive in the fight of his political life” (Prager & Morlin, 2005). In the news articles, Jim West denied the allegations of pedophilia, but not the charges of

engaging in online chats with 17- and 18-year-old boys on Gay.com. In the print articles, reporters surrounded Jim West's denial of the allegations with quotation marks. Consider this May 10 story:

Spokane Mayor Jim West announced Monday he is taking a leave from office to give himself a few weeks to gather his thoughts and prepare a defense against "false accusations leveled against me." West made the announcement even as new allegations surfaced against the mayor that he had offered City Hall posts to two men he met online. (Prager & Steele, 2005)

The rest of the article provided context: "The embattled mayor made a brief appearance before the City Council at its regular weekly briefing session. He gave no indication he has any intention of resigning despite new calls that the mayor step down." Jim West was put on the defensive (he is "embattled"), and his words were countered with additional information or with accusations from victims. Reporters portrayed West and his actions as methodical, intentional, and proactive. The mayor assumed the role of the 'trickster' whose chicanery had been uncovered. He was highly sexed, deviant, self destructive, representing the anti-hero.

Online West resembled a different character. Jim West the trickster became a villain and even a victim or a "scapegoat," dejected and confused with little control over his actions. In an audio-taped interview with reporters, visitors listened to reporter Bill Morlin interrogating West in an insistent, accusatory voice. West responded in a soft voice. He repeatedly denied the claims of pedophilia though he confessed to being a confused gay man in the closet. West said: "The gay.com thing, I can't recall, but it hasn't been very long. I don't know why I go there to tell you the truth" (Morlin &

Steele, 2005). West's responses were consistent and short, but also very passive. The repetition of his denials over and over alongside his admissions of confusion made him a more sympathetic character than the one found in the story. When the reader clicked into those very explicit, very personal chats between West and the gay teens, yet another aspect of West's character emerged. There, the extent of West's inner turmoil as well as the extent of his hypocrisy came through. Page after page of unedited, extensive discussions with West, the victims, and other sources revealed a much more layered version of the story.

In addition, "lost" characters who never made it into print were rediscovered in the web material. The following comes from an interview between Morlin and victim Rob Galliher:

Q: How had Hahn, let's go back to the East Bowl thing. So what happens, he picks you up at East Bowl while you're hanging out there with so of your buddies? Was Brett there that night?

A: No, cause Brett was a few years old than me, so he hung out there at a time also. But by the time I got there, he'd moved on, he was in junior or high, or whatever. We really didn't hang out together there. (Morlin, 2005b)

"Brett" – a local boy in Rob Galliher's town – was only a half-developed character in this interview, and he was completely absent from the printed news story.

Other characters were filled out online. In the *Spokesman-Review* story about Councilwoman Cherie Rodgers' conflict with Mayor Jim West, the reporter selected only a couple sentences from her interview to publish (Prager, 2005b). Rodgers played only a bit part in the story. Online, more details about her personal life emerged: "Oh happy

Mothers' Day by the way," Prager said to Rodgers at the beginning of his interview with her. She replied, "oh! Thank you, thank you! You're the one who noticed!" (Morlin, 2005d). Her small talk with the reporter contributed a narrative dialogue to the web narrative. Because the reader could learn such details, the character of Rodgers became more sympathetic, more complex, and more real, but only in relation to the reporting process.

The journalists appeared in the text as characters

The Spokesman-Review print reporters referred to the newspaper's role in Jim West's downfall in neutral, third-party terms, in which the newspaper was only an institutional source (Prager, 2006). Reporters did not appear in the stories except as the bylined authors. This held true even for stories that involved *The Spokesman-Review* as a news creator, such as "Stories the result of a 3-year investigation," written by Editor Steve Smith (2005a), and "West denies having online sex in office" (Prager, 2005b). In the latter, for example, West called *Spokesman-Review* editor Steve Smith at home with his denial, and it was that conversation that prompted the story. Yet, Smith's part as a news source was not acknowledged until the sixth paragraph of the printed text. The story was written in the third person, by a journalist other than Smith.

Online, the story became much more personal for the reporters, who became active participants in the narrative. Their institutional cloak loosened, and their personal lives, personalities, and personal opinions emerged. On the tapes, the reporters cajoled and engaged in small talk to get the source to talk more freely. The interviews included the voices of the reporters and/or the photographers, who often commented on the

ongoing news. For example, in an interview with Michael Grant, the photographer suggested West might commit suicide after the series ran (Morlin, 2005f).

Q (Reporter): You know we've gotten to others. But I don't know them all. We think if we publish this story we're going to hear from some others. We're open.

(Spokesman-Review photographer) Brian Plonka: I am almost think when West sees this he's going to kill himself.

A (Victim): I hope so.

Q (Reporter): That would be your hope?

A: I hope he does. I hope he takes the same route that Hahn did. (Morlin, 2005b)

The photographer's comment directed the flow of this particular conversation thread. This part of the exchange did not make it into the news story itself. It represented a departure from journalistic professional norms of objectivity.

In another example, the Spokesman-Review.com videographer taped Jim West's press conference after the FBI had declined to investigate him further. The camera panned the S-R reporters, who were frantically taking notes. Much of the press conference contained sparring between these two S-R reporters and West. Visitors could hear the annoyance in West's voice as he addressed S-R reporters Bill Morlin and Karen Dorn Steele: "You understand the word 'no,' Bill? They found no evidence," and later, West added, "That's not quite what they said, Karen, and you know that" ("News conference with Jim West responding to FBI investigation", 2005). In this clip, the animosity between journalist and source was vividly displayed. The reporters acted in the story as individuals. "Bill" and "Karen" became active characters. A portion of this exchange made it into the print story, but the personal attacks were no longer about the

reporters Bill or Karen. Instead, West was assailing a venerable institution, *The Spokesman-Review*, as in the news story corresponding to the video, “West says S-R created ‘mob mentality’ ” (Prager, 2006).

Similarly, in his chats with readers, Smith talked about his children and how his decision to publish had as much to do with his obligations as a father as his duties as a journalist. Here is one of his responses to one reader in a May 9 chat, I’m a parent... If a public official hits on my 18-year-old son, I’m not going to be worried about his political affiliation” (Sands, 2005). In the course of redirecting reader criticism of the newspaper coverage to the West news, Smith inserted himself in the narrative.

In the newspaper story “West denies having online sex in office” (Prager, 2005b) mentioned at the beginning of this section, Smith’s role was merely to facilitate the denial of West, who called Smith at home one Sunday morning. The following is an excerpt of what was posted to the website that afternoon:

Mayor West called my cell phone at 6:37 a.m. I called back at 6:38.

He was initially emotional, slightly choked up, but otherwise calm and soft-spoken. “I didn’t do it,” was the first thing he said after introductions.

I asked him what he meant by that, what didn’t he do? (Smith, 2005a)

Occasionally, Smith had made an interpretive notation in the notes:

“I don’t know what to do. I just want to get through tomorrow.”

(Not a reference to suicide, but getting through the messiness of today’s news and getting back into his office, at least that was my sense of what he meant.) (Smith, 2005a)

The use of the first-person viewpoint and the format of the notes indicated that these were not meant to be viewed as a traditional news story. By reading this account, readers could verify what West said, or at least this was the illusion. (In fact, the reader only had Smith's typed version of that interview.) Smith was the main actor in this piece, which was told from his perspective. West was a secondary actor; his words were surrounded by quotation marks and the only insight for the reader must come from Smith. Again, this had the effect of shifting the focus of the news narrative from the trickster (West) to the individual journalist, or at least the newsgathering.

Readers become characters

Audience members joined reporters as characters in the new narrative online. In the reader forums and chats with Smith, more than 500 people contributed to the news narrative online. They were identified with names such as "mike," "J.G.," "Grandma," and "In Brooklyn." Readers were introduced to new characters such as "Scott," who shared some of his most intimate details of his life as a gay man (Scott, 2005)

I know firsthand that coming to terms with being gay causes some very self-destructive and hateful behavior. When I was in college, I lashed out against gays on campus and spouted the most hateful speech against other gays to cover up and deny the feelings I have for other men. It was a horrible way to live, and in that sense I feel sympathy for Mr. West. (Scott, 2005)

Readers conducted their own investigations and reported anew in the online spaces of both the forums and the blogs. The authors dissected both the news event and the coverage of Jim West in *The Spokesman-Review*:

The historical allegations do need further evidence and investigation to hang the guilty label on the Mayor...At one point the Mayor assures motobrook “don’t worry, you’ll get it” regarding a paid internship position in the Mayors office...The abuse of his office is what needs to be investigated to verify the allegations that West himself documented in his gay.com and AOL AIM conversations. (JRA, 2005)

This entry indicated the extent to which “JRA” had poured over the transcripts of the chats between West and Moto-Brock. “JRA” distinguished between what was legal and what was not. He quoted from the evidence available online. Here “JRA” wove his own web of facticity.

Similarly, in the blogs that were linked to the Spokesman-Review.com, citizens wrote for themselves, for other publications, and for businesses and organizations. The authors filled the blog space with clarifications and verifications about Jim West, gays, the recall vote, the media coverage, or virtually any topic/feeling/situation that the news article might intentionally or unintentionally have conveyed. The bloggers often reiterated the news, which they culled from various (usually unnamed) sources. For example, Theresa Allen provided a tick-tock timeline of the results of the recall vote as it unfolded in real-time December 2005 on her MSN-Spaces blog:

*It is now 11:45 am. I turned on the television about 15 minutes ago. I haven’t seen an update banner on the recall yet. Gads...soap operas are the pits, aren’t they?

*Noon. No count yet. According to the news, there will be no count numbers until 8:15 tonight...

*7:15 pm. Still waiting. I've been checking my "hits" stats and I've gotten 97 hits since about 3 pm. I usually see a total of about 30 hits a day. Of those hits since 3 pm, something like 20 of them are "The Spokesman - Review/Technorati."

Hahahahaha...

*8:15 pm. With a vote of 38,718 (65%) for and 20,681 (35%) against, Jim West has been recalled from office. His last day in office will be December 16, 2005.

He will be replaced by Dennis Hession... (Allen, 2005)

Theresa Allen was not a reporter. The reader did not know her background or her occupation. Yet here she reported on the news narrative as if she were a part of the Fourth Estate. She checked the facts of the *Spokesman-Review* coverage, and updated the results of the news. Her mention of (and glee over) the "hits" coming from Spokesman-Review.com positioned her as a competitor, on the same level as the newspaper. With the real-time tick-tock structure, it was as if she were the journalist reporting to her readers the latest in the election. This method of writing gave the audience the impression that they were getting the very most up-to-date information available.

Both bloggers and readers on the site's forums "corrected" versions they read in other blogs or on other media publications. An excerpt from a Spokesman-Review.com reader comment follows as an example:

I have a few things to say about the SR's fast-and-loose approach to journalism.

By using a surrogate to post as an 18-year-old on the Internet, the SR has violated a sacred canon of journalism. (disgustedjournalist, 2005)

This snippet represents only a tiny piece of the entire comment. Here

"disgustedjournalist" produced his or her own repair of the story, reminding the

Spokesman-Review of its traditional journalistic industry standards. He or she pointed out the flaws of the coverage and posted an alternate interpretation of the material that the newspaper had published.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Spokesman-Review reporters followed the traditional news paradigm in their newspaper coverage of Jim West, and attempted to prove they had done so on their website. Online, the journalists posted the raw reportage in order to provide verification for their allegations in the newspaper. They used the online venue to “repair” the news in the tradition of Bennett et al. (1985). The chats, the blogs, the documents, the interview transcripts – all of these provided documentation for the original news reporting. In the web space, journalists dropped the institutional veneer, and invited readers to “see for themselves,” to “experience” the news as reporters did (S. Smith, personal communication, 2006). Surely readers would not come to a different conclusion than what ran in the newspapers. If they did, editors and reporters could “fix” their mistaken impression in a blog or a forum. *Spokesman-Review* Editor Steven Smith held chats with readers about how and why the newspaper conducted its investigation into Spokane Mayor Jim West’s alleged pedophilia (Pitts, 2005; Sands, 2005). To each criticism expressed in a chat, Smith “repaired” the wayward impression by defending the newspaper’s actions. He detailed his thought process in a way that might resonate with readers – by relating his personal experience (Pitts, 2005). In constantly referring back to the journalism and the newspaper, Smith was branding the work as traditional journalism. “Our Sunday story covered this ground,” Smith patiently responded to one question

(Pitts, 2005); in another chat, he said: “Besides, this story shouldn’t be about us. It is about Mayor West and that’s where the focus ought to be” (Sands, 2005).

In doing this, Smith and the reporters changed the news narrative of Jim West in spite of themselves. These findings suggested that the story of the “embattled” mayor, a mythic tale about a “trickster” with dubious motivations, transformed into a chronicle of newsgathering in which old facts were reordered and new facts emerged.

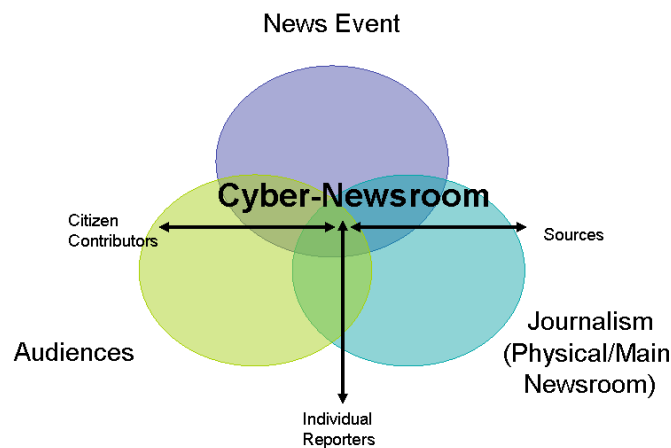
FACTICTY	PRINT	WEB
What	Trickster myth	Back-story of journalism
Why	West’s confusion, malevolence	Newsgathering verification
Where	News events	Newsgathering process
When	Past	Granulated
Who	Archetypes	Complex characters, including reporters, readers

A journalism of verification (perhaps approaching what Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001, had in mind) offered a more granulated accounting with complex characters and shifting settings/chronologies.

In this case study, readers interacted with journalists, the news content, and other readers and so took part in forming the ultimate news narrative online. In a way, readers practiced their own version of news repair in that the web technology gave them the opportunity to control information on the virtual pages of these newspapers. Online, if readers took issue with the coverage, they had the newspaper’s own space to criticize the journalism. They could follow up their criticisms of the news coverage with original reporting. Like reporters, readers utilized quotation marks and hyperlinks to source the

material. Like reporters, they presented the evidence and then made an evaluation based on that information. In this space, readers could literally help determine those 5Ws.

This sharing of information production changed the dynamics of the journalism, resulting in a re-negotiation of the news paradigm within cyberspace. In a sense, *The Spokesman-Review* created a second-order newsroom on its website. The following figure illustrates this “cyber-newsroom,” at least as it pertains to this specific case study of *The Spokesman-Review*:



Cyber-Newsroom: The news event, its shapers, reporters, and audiences come together in cyberspace. Within this space, news as first gathered by journalists is negotiated by individual sources, reporters, and citizens, who then add to the reporting. The result influences subsequent news events and their coverage. This process transforms the look of the ultimate news narrative.

The press still operated the “first-order,” physical, or main newsroom in which the Jim West facts were ordered into comprehensive stories. But online, the publication offered a new space of verification. This realm represented a sub-layer of active newsgathering, production, and consumption. Within this space, the public of the edited journalism merged with the private, unedited back-story of the news as well as of sources, journalists, and audience members. The interactions with the extra material resulted in the formation of a new narrative, one that emphasized the journalism rather than the news

story. It's hard to say what a new newsroom layer might mean for "reality" and "truth," but certainly this evidence indicated that a new negotiating process over news production, the news narrative, and ultimately news meaning seems to be forming online, at least in some newsroom projects.

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